226/3 Lect. B: Introductory Fiction Workshop

Tuesday & Thursday 14:45-16:00 (2017-2018)
Instructor: Terry Byrnes

English 226 is an introductory workshop in prose fiction reading and writing. The term "prose fiction" covers a variety of forms, from the anecdote to the multi-volume "novel cycle." However, we will often concentrate on the short story—while being completely open to the writing and discussion of longer (and shorter) forms, and to those kinds of story that fall under the loose heading of "experimental."

Throughout most of the fall term, we will study and discuss published fiction from a writer's point of view, and we will develop a limited but useful set of critical terms and approaches. Our goal is to learn to evaluate and appreciate fiction based on its qualities as a developed narrative rather than on the reader's personal likes or dislikes. Toward the end of the fall term, we will begin to workshop original fiction written by members of the class. This will continue to the end of the year.

There are no formulas for writing successful fiction, but there are useful guides. Learning to write well always requires: reading (widely, in fiction and non-fiction); writing failed stories as well as successful ones; rewriting; and, in our case, the presentation of written work for discussion. The class will offer suggestions, criticism, and support in an attempt to make the trial-and-error process of learning to write a little more efficient. Since most writers are interested in publishing their work, we'll also be mindful of the relationship(s) between writer and reader, of the qualities that can make fiction publishable, and of places to publish.

Students who successfully complete this workshop will have a better understanding of what prose fiction is and how it works, of their own interests and abilities as writers, and of the ways in which memories of experience and narratives of experience are quite different. Also, we will likely encounter some of the thorny questions that currently surround all forms of artistic representation. These run the gamut from the ethics of "cultural appropriation" to the use of pronouns that indicate gender. It's important to keep in mind that any position we hold on these matters is to be supported with reasoned argument and respectful presentation.

Workshop Procedure

The workshop has one required text—a course pack with a wide selection of stories that we will discuss and, possibly, you will use as touchstones for your own work. When we begin to discuss your writing, there will be due dates for the completion and submission of each story. You will be responsible for copying, collating, and distributing your writing to the class. Normally, one week (or more) after your work has been distributed, the story will be discussed. It's essential that you read all work carefully (at least once) before we discuss it. Ultimately, the workshop produces its own textbook—your writing—and its own gloss on that text.

This course has a Moodle page, which is accessible through your Concordia portal. Weekly plans and messages will be posted there.

Requirements

1) The completion of about one assignment/week during the fall term, due Thursdays. Each assignment is to be dated and will include word count
2) The completion of a *minimum* of 20 double-spaced pages (or 10 single-spaced pages, or about 5000 words) of original fiction. This total includes *at least* two pieces of original fiction and, normally, one substantial rewrite

3) Written comments on all stories submitted to the workshop. These are signed, dated, and given to the author

4)The submission (at the end of each term) of a list of all the fiction and non-fiction you've read in connection with this class and of a list of all stories for which you have supplied written comments to the authors

Evaluation

Your first-term assignments will be evaluated as a group. They must be submitted (in duplicate) on the specified due dates. When we begin workshop discussion of your stories, individual stories will not receive grades. They will be discussed in the workshop and the author will receive my written comments. If you'd like additional feedback, see me. Always feel free to return to a point you don't understand.

The completion of assignments and 20 pages (5000 words) of fiction is the *minimum requirement* for receiving a passing grade. Your final grade will reflect these elements: first-term assignments; your original fiction (including grammar and manuscript preparation); improvement throughout the year; participation (includes written as well as spoken feedback *and* punctuality). *There is no portfolio requirement for this class.*

Class attendance is essential and required. Absences will affect your final grade in this manner: if you miss 4 classes throughout the year, your grade will be decreased by 1/3 of a letter grade for each *additional* absence. For instance, if the grade based on quality of writing, improvement and participation is B+, but you have 5 absences for the year, the final grade will be B. Six absences will drop it to B-, and so on.

Important Notes and Dates

Since your fiction is an essential component of the work that serves as our "textbook," it must be submitted during the life of the course on a schedule that will be circulated. *Work submitted to satisfy page requirements at the end of the workshop will not be accepted.*

Manuscript Preparation

Manuscripts must be submitted in a way that's consistent with the conventional way printed fiction is formatted and published (see examples in course pack). It must be paginated, have the name of the author, date, *and word count*. If you do use a personal method of formatting, be prepared to show how it relates to the work. Standard usage is transparent; exceptions compete for the eye's attention and become an element of the narrative itself.

Texts

Other than the course pack, there are no required textbooks for this class, though I recommend James Wood's *How Fiction Works*, John Gardner's *The Art of Fiction*, best-of anthologies, little magazines (Google "literary magazines" and you'll find a slew of them), on-line magazines such as *Narrative*, and commercial magazines such as *The New Yorker*. I also have a collection of fiction anthologies and I'm happy to loan these books.

Contact

Tuesdays and Thursdays after (and, often, before) class or by appointment.

Office: LB 683-16. Phone: 514 848-2424 Ext. 2352. E-mail: terence.byrnes@concordia.ca

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